

## EDITORIAL

## Bad Switch

We trust that Rep. Rodney Alexander (La.) is being well-rewarded by House Republican leaders for his switch to the GOP on Aug. 6. For the deceitful way he did it — less than 30 minutes before the filing deadline and after first filing as a Democrat just days earlier — he certainly has aroused the ire of Louisiana and national Democrats, many of his state's newspapers, his Washington staff and, presumably, some voters in his district.

The Louisiana Democratic Party is suing to have Alexander removed from the ballot on the grounds that he violated state election law by collecting signatures to qualify as a Democrat, then switching. We're not Louisiana lawyers, so we don't know whether the suit is merited or, as Alexander says, "frivolous." In principle, we think that voters in the 5th district should be able to vote for — or against — whomever they want, including Alexander.

And this is precisely why what Alexander did was so perfidious: He deprived the voters in his district of the opportunity to have a fair choice in this election. He owed them fair warning that he was intent on switching parties, so that Democrats could select a viable candidate against him.

Last March, when rumors swirled he was about to switch, he denied them and expressed loyalty to the Democratic Party. On Aug. 4, he actually filed for re-election as a Democrat. So, his switch two days later can only have been a political maneuver.

As Roll Call columnist Stuart Rothenberg points out in his column today, the eternal model for the right way to switch parties is then-Rep. (and later Sen.) Phil Gramm of Texas. Gramm was re-elected to the House in 1982 as a Democrat, resigned his seat two months later and stood for re-election as a Republican in a February 1983 special election. Of the dozens of others who have switched parties in the past 30 years, Gramm stands alone in assuring that voters in his district had an opportunity to accept or reject him after changing his party label.

Alexander — and, illustrating that this myopia afflicts Members of both parties, Sen. Jim Jeffords (I-Vt.) — are examples of how not to switch. Jeffords was re-elected for a third term as a Republican in 2000. Just a few months into the new Congress, he decided to switch, formally becoming an Independent but voting with Democrats and enabling them to take over the Senate. Surely, Vermont voters deserved a chance to factor in the possibility that their votes would turn the Senate from Republican to Democrat.

The best that can be said about Alexander is that, after House Democrats demanded it, he vowed to return campaign contributions from fellow Members and anyone else who asks. House Democrats want him to return party funds that helped him get elected by a hairsbreadth in 2002, but that's not necessary. He did serve most of his first term as a Democrat, even if he often voted with Republicans.

Alexander almost certainly will be re-elected. A virtual unknown, homemaker Zelma Blakes, has filed to run as a Democrat. Former state Rep. Jock Scott (R) is also in the race, but polls show Alexander ahead by nearly 70 points. The district is heavily Republican, and he's been voting in tune with his district. So the problem isn't so much with the fact that Alexander switched. It's how he did it that he should be ashamed of.



## GUEST OBSERVER

By Frank J. Cilluffo and Daniel J. Kaniewski

## Commission's Proposals Fall on Deaf Ears

President Bush demonstrated decisive leadership last week when he announced his proposal to reform the intelligence community, brushing aside the significant bureaucratic hurdles and political risks associated with such a bold move. While this is the second major reorganization of the executive branch since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the president's actions heretofore have been met by no equivalent reforms in Congress. Congress must follow the president's lead and confront a reorganization of its own head-on if the nation's intelligence and homeland security efforts are to be successful.

It is not for lack of outside guidance that Congress has failed to reform itself. Most recently the 9/11 commission recommended Con-

gressional reforms, stating: "Unity of effort in executive management can be lost if it is fractured by divided congressional oversight." The recommendations, in the spotlight now because of the 9/11 commission media blitz, are not breaking news; several other commissions reached similar conclusions well before the attacks of 9/11. The Gilmore Commission (December 1999), Hart-Rudman Commission (April 2000), Bremer Commission (June 2000) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (December 2000) all recommended Congress unify its homeland security efforts.

Congress should follow the president's lead and take two immediate actions recommended by the 9/11 commission, et al. First, the Intelligence committees should be given legislative authorities that match the scope of the proposed national intelligence director. Second, the House Select Committee on Homeland Security should be

made permanent and fully empowered. The Senate too should stand up a homeland security committee, using the House committee as a model.

As was seen last week and previously in the wake of 9/11, the president is moving on calls for reform, while Congress continues to turn a blind eye to its own needed reforms. Now it is Congress' turn to act. With dozens of committees and subcommittees vying for control over the Department of Homeland Security and an impending shake up to the intelligence community, Congressional leaders should overcome the internal strife and take decisive action. If Congress is unable to unify its efforts, the executive branch will be making policy while Congress is busy routing and rubberstamping.

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